

Message Text

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TAGS: PFOR, XO, MPOL, FR, UK

SUBJECT: FRANCO-AMERICAN DISCUSSIONS ON INDIAN OCEAN:

TRI-LATERAL POSSIBILITY

REF: (A) PARIS 2657 (B) USNATO 581

1. SUMMARY: WE BELIEVE UK WOULD NOT OBJECT TO FRANCO-AMERICAN BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS ON THE INDIAN OCEAN. PRESENT UK CONSULTATIONS WITH THE FRENCH ON THIS SUBJECT ARE ON A LOW LEVEL WITH, AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL, LITTLE IN THE WAY OF DETAILED EXCHANGES ON MOST SENSITIVE AREA ISSUES. THE UK PROBABLY WOULD PREFER TO AVOID TRI-LATERALS WHICH MIGHT TEND TO WEAKEN IMPRESSION OF INTIMATE US/UK COOPERATION ON INDIAN OCEAN MATTERS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN CONSIDERING POSSIBLE US/UK/FRENCH CONSULTATIONS ON THE INDIAN OCEAN, IT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED THAT THE RENEWED IMPETUS FOR US/UK TALKS IN 1974 WAS A BRITISH INITIATIVE MADE IN CONNECTION WITH NEGOTIATIONS FOR EXPANDED U.S. USE OF DIEGO GARCIA. THE BRITISH MADE THE
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POINT THAT THEY WOULD BE BETTER PREPARED TO PROVIDE

SUPPORT TO U.S. OPERATIONS IF THEY KNOW THE POLICY FRAMEWORK IN WHICH U.S. REQUESTS ARE MADE. HMG POLICY IS TO ENCOURAGE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE AREA BUT THIS POLICY IS NOT WITHOUT CRITICS, BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL. HMG SEES JOINT CONSULTATIONS AS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN COUNTERING THIS CRITICISM.

3. TRI-LATERAL TALKS WOULD DILUTE APPEARANCE OF INTIMATE US/UK COOPERATION ON INDIAN OCEAN AND WOULD BE LESS SATISFACTORY TO BRITISH THAN CURRENT REGULAR BI-LATERALS. TRI-LATERALS ALSO MIGHT BE LESS VALUABLE IN TERMS OF SUBSTANCE AS THE TWO OPERATING PARTNERS, I.E., U.S. AND UK, PROBABLY WOULD BE LESS FORTHCOMING WITH THE FRENCH ON PLANNING ACTIVITIES THAN THEY WOULD BE WITH EACH OTHER.

4. ANOTHER OPTION WOULD BE A MIX OF BI-LATERAL AND TRI-LATERAL CONSULTATIONS. THIS WOULD APPEAR UNDESIRABLE BECAUSE PARIS UNDOUBTEDLY WOULD FEEL - RIGHTLY OR WRONG - ITS ANGLO-AMERICAN PARTNERS WERE HOLDING BACK INFORMATION IN THE TRI-LATERAL FORUM.

5. US/FRENCH BI-LATERALS WOULD APPEAR TO HAVE NONE OF THE DISADVANTAGES MENTIONED ABOVE. THE BRITISH WOULD NOT FEEL THAT THEY WERE BEING "LUMPED IN" WITH THE FRENCH. THE U.S. COULD DISCUSS SOME SUBJECTS WITH THE FRENCH WHICH DO NOT NORMALLY ARISE IN THE REGULAR CONSULTATIONS WITH THE BRITISH, E.G. DIEGO GARCIA, WHICH BY MUTUAL CONSENT IS NOT DISCUSSED. FINALLY, HOLDING TWO BI-LATERALS MIGHT AVOID CREATING THE IMPRESSION THAT THERE IS A NATO INNER GROUP ON THE INDIAN OCEAN WHICH IS AVOIDING DISCUSSION IN A LARGER NATO FORUM.

6. WE BELIEVE THE BRITISH WOULD HAVE NO OBJECTION TO FRANCO-AMERICAN BI-LATERALS AND PROBABLY WOULD WELCOME THEM. BRITAIN'S INDIAN OCEAN BI-LATERAL DISCUSSIONS WITH THE FRENCH HAVE BEEN SO LOW-KEY AND HAVE HAD SO LITTLE PUBLIC VISIBILITY THAT HMG HAS APPEARED RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS THEIR CONTENT WITH US. INITIATION OF US/FRENCH BI-LATERALS ON THE INDIAN OCEAN WOULD REMOVE THIS PROBLEM.

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7. IN SUM, THIS EMBASSY CONCURS GENERALLY IN EMBASSY PARIS RECOMMENDATION BUT BELIEVES THE BENEFITS OF SUCH CONSULTATIONS WOULD BE MEASURABLY GREATER IN BI-LATERAL FORA THAN IN A TRI-LATERAL ONE, WHERE A NUMBER OF SUBSTANTIVE AND PROCEDURAL DIFFICULTIES LIKELY WOULD ARISE.

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